**PUNCTUAL CHRISTIANS**

***The White Rabbit and Me***

Remember White Rabbit in the opening scene of Lewis Carroll’s classic story *Alice In Wonderland*? He would carry his pocket watch and with great anxiety shout, “I’m late! I’m late! For a very important date!” When Alice would try to stop him to discover what he was late for, he would fretfully shout back, “No time to say goodbye, hello, I’m late, I’m late, I’m late!” We laughed at that scene as he then darted into his rabbit hole under the tree, thus leading Alice into that crazy Wonderland of the Mad Hatter, the Cheshire Cat, the Queen of Hearts and other weird characters.

Punctuality is a virtue. Tardiness is a vice. In the course of our lives we usually develop the habit of one or the other. So let me ask YOU, which one best defines this habit in your character: Punctual or Tardy?

Punctuality is defined as “the quality or habit of adhering to an appointed time; strict observance in keeping engagements; promptness.” Whether it be the time card punched at work, the dinner appointment with a friend, or assembly time when we come to worship God, we speak volumes about our attitude by the promptness or tardiness of our arrival. The Latin word ***punctus*** is where we get our words like punctuation. It allows you to be very precise in the sentence. Punctual carries the same idea as being precise or exact in what you do. The word actually came from the word “point” – as, “to come to the point!” Be exact. Be precise. Be on time!

Be assured of this, everyone is late every once in a while. Unforeseen circumstances throw us off our schedule. Those can’t be helped. But I’m talking about habit, which is your common, day-to-day practice concerning time management. In some areas of life it might not be so crucial, but in others (like attending Bible class or worship) it is critical, for it has a negative effect on you and others around you who wish to worship God.

Maybe a few quotes will better ease us into this discussion. “Laugh and the world laughs with you, be prompt and you dine alone” (Gerald Barzan). That’s funny. But being more serious Lord Nelson said, “I owe all my success in life to having been always a quarter of an hour before my time.” Businessman Thomas Haliburton said, “Puntuality is the soul of business.” W. Fisk said it best: “I give it as my deliberate and solemn conviction that the individual who is habitually tardy in meeting an appointment will never be respected or successful in life.” Sir Francis Drake said it best: “Better late than never, but never late is better!”

When I said tardiness is a vice let me explain why I said that.

**Isn’t being late a stealing of someone else’s time?**

If you are late to work you are stealing time from the company that pays you. That bad habit will eventually get you demoted, or fired.

**Isn’t being late a lack of respect for others**?

Paul said in Romans 12:10, “*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another*.” I show preference in many ways, not the least of which is in keeping my word regarding an appointment with you. Paul also said in Philippians 2:3, “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself*.” Would I esteem my boss, or the President, more than my Lord Jesus, or my brother in Christ? In other words, would being punctual to work take priority over being punctual to worship?

**Isn’t being late a violation of the Golden Rule**?

Matthew 7:12 is that famous text we all know so well, “*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them*.” Treat others as we want to be treated. Do I like it when I have to patiently wait on others when they are late? If you are a teacher that is going through a carefully planned and studied lesson with your students (whether adult or children) and are then interrupted by others coming in 5 to 10 minutes late (virtually every week), is that not rude to upset the momentum of the class as everything suddenly becomes a bit chaotic? It breaks the concentration of both the teacher and the students. If you are habitually late, put yourself in the teacher’s shoes. Do unto them as you would want done to you. Be punctual.

**Isn’t being late a missed opportunity to touch other’s lives**?

By coming early to worship think of the golden opportunity to visit with your brethren or talk to visitors who have come for the first time. These minutes before we enter worship, as my church family is coming in, is one of life’s greatest treasures. Shaking hands or giving a hug to my brethren or their children is like a cup of hot tea on a cold winter day (i.e. I hate coffee)! I love it. Chatting with visitors who have come from far away, or from around the block to check us out, is the opportunity to impact a life for time and eternity. By being late I miss that golden moment.

Punctuality has a deep impact on our personal lives. It will certainly make us better people. Remember Lord Nelson’s quote earlier? Let me finish his full statement: “I have always been a quarter of an hour before my time, and it has made a man out of me!” I say it will make a better Christian out of you too. Jesus comes into every one of our assemblies, so I want to be there to greet Him with a calm, prayerful mindset, not a rushed, panting hurried-up dash at the last second. He is watching and waiting for me. Will I be late? My punctual arrival shows Him that I believe He is here, and that I am diligently seeking Him (Hebrews 11:6). It also shows that I am seeking first the kingdom and His righteousness, putting that as a top priority in my life (Matthew 6:33).

Let’s not be like the White Rabbit who anxiously shouted, “I’m late! I’m late! For a very important date.” Let’s be precise. Let’s be punctual. Let’s come into our Lord’s presence … on time.

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